Reforms Commission (ERC), in its report entitled 'Rationalising Fertilizer Subsidies' submitted to the Government in September, 2000, has *inter-alia* recommended replacement of the existing Retention Price-cum-Subsidy Scheme by a group-based Concession Scheme after dividing urea units into 5 groups based on feed-stock and vintage and prescribing uniform rates of concession for each group. Although the Finance Minister has, while presenting the Central Government's Budget for 2001-2002, made the announcement to the effect that the recommendations of the Expenditure Reforms Commission for a phased programme of complete decontrol by April 1, 2006 would be implemented from April 1, 2001, the Government is examining the recommendations of ERC with a view to formulate a new pricing policy for urea units which will aim at bringing uniformity and transparency in payment of subsidy to urea manufacturers and also induce them to take cost reduction measures on their own and be competitive.

Use of unharmful pesticides

*199. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Research Department has considered that use of alternative and unharmful pesticides using neem seeds and other conventional seeds rather than chemicals;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS (SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH DHINDSA): (a) to (c) The Government is promoting research on the use of alternative and unharmful pesticides using neem seeds. A country program entitled "Development and Production of Neem Products as Environment Friendly Pesticides" is being undertaken by the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals with the financial assistance of United Nations Development Program (UNDP)/United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). The same is being implemented with the objective to promote production, processing

and use of neem based products, thereby aiding waste land development, generating rural employment and providing farmers with eco-friendly/biodegradable pesticides.

Decline of interest in science

†*200. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in spite of Government and social efforts, the interest in science among students is decreasing;

(b) whether it is also a fact that universities are unable to find students for the graduate courses this year; and

(c) if so, the details of students joining the science faculty of the universities during the last three years?

THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI): (a) to (c) In the present globally competitive market and availability of a wider variety of professionally oriented courses offering better job opportunities appears to have attracted students to various disciplines. This is a cyclical phenomenon with ups and downs. Student interest is influenced by a complex range of sociological, cultural and economic factors. Government has continued to take up a large number of initiatives to encourage students to take up science as a career e.g. National Children Science Congress, National Science Olympiad Programme, Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana, Swarnajayanti Fellowship for young scientists, Better Opportunities for Young Scientists in Chosen Areas of Science & Technology for training in leading international laboratories, Fast Track Programme for Young Scientists, Biotechnology fellowships to young students and scientists, CSIR Programme on youth for leadership in Science, Opportunities to young science students for interaction with Nobel laureate and visiting fellowships, summer schools and training programmes to enable students for interaction with scientists in national laboratories.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.